IN THE CLAIMS

1.    (currently amended)  A method for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

receiving shipping information from a user via the device;

comparing the ~~received~~ shipping information against pre-stored information;

selecting at least one shipping carrier which matches the ~~received~~ shipping information; ~~information; and~~

displaying the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping information; and~~information.~~

defining at least one of a user identification number and a password for each department related to the at least one shipping carrier.

2.    (original)  A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of receiving shipping information comprises the step of receiving at least one of a package type, a place of origin, a destination, a Latest delivery date, a Latest time, and a Weight of the package.

3.    (original)  A method according to Claim 2 wherein said step of selecting at least one shipping carrier comprises the steps of:

retrieving an optimum shipping carrier and associated costs; and

downloading the optimum shipping carrier and associated costs.

4.    (currently amended)  A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping information further comprises the steps of:

displaying at least one of a carrier, a rate, a shipping method and delivery times details of the shipping~~the optimum~~ method; and

displaying at least one other alternative carrier including a name of the alternative carrier, a rate of the alternative carrier, a shipping method and delivery times details of the alternative carrier.

5.      (currently amended)  A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of receiving shipping information from~~data from~~ a user further comprises the step of receiving a user identification and a password for authentication purposes.

6.      (currently amended)  A method according to Claim 1 wherein said step of displaying further comprises the steps of:

accessing a website of the selected shipping carrier; and

generating a shipping label on at least one of an attached printer and a network printer.

7.      (original)  A method according to Claim 1 wherein the shipping information is received from the user via a graphical user interface.

8.      (currently amended)  A method according to Claim 1 further comprising the step of validating compatibility based on the ~~received~~ shipping information to determine whether a resulting optimum shipping method is capable of meeting key parameters defined by a user.

9.      (original)  A method according to Claim 8 further comprising the step of guiding the user to the optimum shipping method.

10.      (currently amended)  A method for selecting at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server coupled to a centralized database and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

authenticating a user ~~based on a pre-defined criteria; and~~via at least one of a first user identification number and a first password before accessing a shipping wizard configured to select an optimum shipping method;

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authenticating the user via at least one of a second user identification number and a second password after accessing the shipping wizard and before accessing a maintenance wizard configured to maintain the centralized database; and

launching at least one of ~~a shipping wizard to select an optimum shipping method and a maintenance wizard to maintain the centralized database.~~the shipping wizard and the maintenance wizard.

11. (canceled)

12. (original) The method according to Claim 10 wherein the device and the server are connected via a network and wherein the network is one of a wide area network, a local area network, an intranet and the Internet.

13. (currently amended) A method for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier using a network-based system including a server coupled to a centralized database and at least one device connected to the server via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

authenticating a user via a first set of pre-defined criteria before providing access to a shipping wizard configured to provide an optimum shipping method;

accessing a maintenance user interface after the user has been authenticated based on the first set of pre-defined criteria;~~a user has been authenticated based on pre-defined criteria; and~~

authenticating the user via a second set of pre-defined criteria after the user has been authenticated based on the first set of pre-defined criteria and before providing capabilities to the user to maintain the centralized database; and

providing capabilities to the user to maintain the centralized database.

14. (original) A method according to Claim 13 wherein said step of providing capabilities further comprises the steps of providing at least one of a functionality that permits the user to register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles.

15.    (original)  A method according to Claim 14 wherein said step of providing capabilities further comprises the steps of downloading and displaying various performance metrics.

16.    (currently amended)  A web-based shipping system for facilitating selection of at least one shipping carrier, said system comprising:

a client sub-system comprising a browser;

a centralized database for storing carrier information;

a server sub-system configured to be coupled to said client sub-system and said centralized database, said server sub-system further configured to:

receive shipping information from a user via the client sub-system;system;

compare the received shipping information against pre-stored information;

select at least one shipping carrier which matches the received shipping information;information; and

display the selected shipping carrier based on the shipping information; andinformation.

accept at least one of a user identification number and a password for each department related to the at least one shipping carrier.

17.    (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 16 wherein said client sub-systemsystem is configured with:

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a home page user interface, an input interface, a user interface displaying an optimum shipping method, a user interface displaying alternative options, a user interface displaying the user's final selection, and a user interface that facilitates printing of a label;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a user interface to access maintenance home page, register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles, and

a sending component for sending an inquiry to the server sub-system~~system~~ so that the server sub-system~~system~~ can process and download requested~~the requested~~ information to the client sub-system.~~system.~~

18.     (original)  A system according to Claim 17 wherein the sending component functions in response to a click of a mouse button.

19.     (original)  A system according to Claim 17 wherein the sending component functions in response to a voice command.

20.     (original)  A system according to Claim 17 wherein said system is further configured to be protected from access by unauthorized individuals.

21.     (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 17 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ is further configured with:

a collection component for collecting information from users into the centralized database;

a tracking component for tracking information on an on-going basis;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a home page user interface, an input interface, a user interface displaying an optimum shipping method, a user interface displaying alternative options, a user interface displaying the user's final selection, and a user interface that facilitates printing of a label;

a displaying component for displaying at least one of a user interface to access maintenance home page, register a new carrier, modify an existing carrier, add locations, edit locations, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles;

a receiving component for receiving an inquiry from the client <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~; and

an accessing component for accessing the centralized database <u>to generate accessed information, said accessing component causing the accessed information to be displayed on the client sub-system.</u>~~and causing the retrieved information to be displayed on the client system.~~

22.  (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured with a receiving component for receiving an inquiry to provide information from one of a plurality of users.

23.  (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured with a processing component for searching and processing received inquiries against <u>said centralized database</u>~~the data storage device~~ containing a variety of information collected by the collection component.

24.  (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured with a retrieving component to retrieve information from the <u>centralized</u> database.

25.  (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 21 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured with an information fulfillment component that downloads the <u>accessed information</u>~~requested information~~ after retrieving from the <u>centralized</u> database to <u>a plurality</u>~~the plurality~~ of users in <u>an</u> <u>order</u>~~the order~~ in which <u>inquiries</u>~~the requests~~ were received by the receiving component.

26.  (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to:

receive at least one of a package type, a place of origin, a destination, a latest delivery date, a latest time, and a weight of <u>a package;</u>~~the package;~~

update the carrier information including <u>the at least one carrier,</u>~~at least one of a carrier,~~ modify <u>the at least one</u>~~an existing~~ carrier, add locations of the <u>at least one</u>

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carrier, edit locations of the <u>at least one</u> carrier, add departments, edit department profiles, add users, and edit user profiles; and

store updated carrier information in the <u>centralized</u> database.

27. (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to enter information at least through one of a voice activation command and a device connected to the client <u>sub-system.</u>~~system.~~

28. (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to <u>update the carrier information and</u> store the updated carrier information against an identifier.

29. (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to:

track the carrier information on a real time basis; and

store the carrier information on a real time basis by updating stored information by adding <u>new</u>~~the new~~ information to the centralized database on a real time basis to provide up-to-date carrier information instantaneously to the user upon a request.

30. (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to:

download requested information from <u>said server sub-system; and</u>~~a server system; and~~

display requested information on <u>the client sub-system</u>~~a client system~~ in response to <u>an inquiry.</u>~~the inquiry.~~

31. (currently amended) A system according to Claim 30 wherein said server <u>sub-system</u>~~system~~ further configured to print the requested information in a pre-determined format.

32.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to accept an inquiry from a user.

33.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 32 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to:

receive an inquiry from the client sub-system~~system~~; and

display information on the client sub-system.~~system.~~

34.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to submit a request through at least one of pull down menus, check boxes, and hypertext links.

35.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to display an HTML document downloaded by the server sub-system.~~system.~~

36.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 33 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to display at least one alternative from various alternatives available to the user.

37.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 30 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to:

access the centralized database;

search the centralized database regarding a specific~~the specific~~ inquiry;

retrieve information from the centralized database; and

transmit the retrieved information to the client sub-system~~system~~ for display by the client sub-system.~~system.~~

38.     (currently amended) A system according to Claim 16 wherein said server sub-system~~system~~ further configured to accept a request for maintenance home page after the user has been authenticated against pre-determined criteria.

39.     (currently amended)  A system according to Claim 16 wherein said client <u>sub-system</u><s>system</s> configured to be a server for a network of customer devices.

40.     (currently amended)  A system according to claim 16 wherein <u>said client sub-system is coupled to said server sub-system via a network, and</u> said network is one of a wide area network, a local area network an intranet and the Internet.